

Report of the President

Robert Milnes
University of North Texas

FIND A PATH, RECORD IT, POINT THE WAY.

I would like to thank all of the individuals who have come to the conference this year. We have over 277 people in attendance, with 43 at the pre-conference workshop for new and aspiring administrators. Fifty-three signed up for the Orientation workshop, and 62 signed up for the workshop on Self Study.

And my great thanks to Chira Kirkland, Teresa Ricciardi, Mark Marion, and of course to Karen Moynahan and Sam Hope for the extraordinary work they have done in preparing the conference and especially to Sam and Karen for so carefully watching over our well being in Washington DC.

And I want to thank all of the members who have volunteered their services as presenters and panelists at the conference. I look forward to the sessions today. A special thanks to Kristi Nelson for her work with the workshop for new and aspiring administrators, Beverly Seley and Lesley Cadman for their efforts in training the new evaluators, and to Sister Cor Immaculatum Heffernan for her work with the experienced evaluators. Outside of our conference structure, there are Working Groups whose reports you have seen who should also be thanked — the Design Futures Working Group and the CAAA Multidisciplinary/Multimedia Working Group.

And finally, to Johanna Branson and the many institutional representatives and senior members who have joined in the truly monumental task of reviewing over 150 cases on the Commission on Accreditation.

The voluntary nature of our organization is at the core of its principles, organization, and activities. Without the commitment and assistance of so many people, we would not be able to do the good work we do, nor would we have the collective wisdom and problem solving abilities we rely upon. My thanks to everyone, I stand in awe of your contributions.

Recently, I attended a Gala for UNT's Health Science Center and their Public Health Program. As a gift at the meeting, I received this wonderful device: a combination flashlight, ink pen, and laser pointer. It struck me as the perfect metaphor for what I wanted to talk about today, which is what I think leaders and educators in the art community should always be about: *Finding a path, recording it, and pointing the way for others.*

Find a Path:

This is a personal, artistic, and institutional activity. I went to a small private liberal arts college as an undergraduate, and to two very large research universities for my MFA and PhD studies. I've taught at six schools including a large magnet arts high school, a small private art school, a comprehensive university, a research university, a very large comprehensive university, and an

emerging research university in different parts of the country. Each one has approached the process and value of teaching and learning differently. They all are quite different institutions now than they were when I was there, I would say all are much better at what they do now and I have learned something at each one.

The current economic crisis has created not only personal havoc but institutional changes that will likely be lasting. Ray Allen, our former president noted, “we may all need to learn how to do what we do less expensively in the future.” As art administrators and leaders in our communities, we need to find a pathway to sustain and support the work of our students and faculty. This requires the creative problem solving skills we all say we teach.

Early on when I was teaching ceramics, one of my colleagues and I were talking about our approaches to making a vase. My friend said when he sat down to throw a vase, he had in his mind’s eye a shape that he would try to attain, trying over and over until he attained it. I said when I sat down, I had an idea of what it might be and I kept working until they were something else and see where I ended up.

I believe that new knowledge comes from exploring depth in a field or from interactions along the boundaries between disciplines. Interdisciplinarity has become not only a buzzword but a driving force in curriculum content and even administrative structures. Even buildings: our new business building at UNT is being designed with over 150 faculty offices on the top floor, but no clear delineations of department areas. In other institutions economic necessity and administrative philosophies have reorganized programs in new, often horizontal, ways. In the way of organizations, new programs, departments, colleges and even institutions arise around the search for new knowledge and, over time, benefit from an occasional house cleaning and reorganization.

At the same time that our disciplines and organizational structures are more diverse, our students and faculty are more diverse as well. We are faced with changing student expectations, new social networking systems that seem to be replacing traditional means of communication and boundaries of time and space around the classroom in ways that provide new opportunities for learning while calling for new guidelines in access as well. Faculty workload issues, the relationship of credit hours and contact hours, and the delivery of class content all present new opportunities and challenges.

Partnerships may be beneficial, or even necessary, or the boundaries redefined, between sectors and tiers of higher education. Kate Wagle, who heads an interdisciplinary center in Portland for the University of Oregon asked the Executive Committee: Could there be added value rather than diminished capacity ... both to the institutions and the communities they serve, through new partnerships?”

On a national and global scale, the major forces which eventually shape our activities are also in flux. Recent political assaults on institutional autonomy have taken both relatively benign and more obstreperous forms, ranging from accountability and sunshine laws to regulations on the total credit hours of degrees.

On the international level, significant changes are taking place in Europe and Asia, as well as in America’s approach to welcoming foreign students and scholars, that are changing enrollment patterns and fostering the rapid growth of new institutions, particularly in Asia. Many of our schools have formed partnerships as a pathway to new audiences and new degree programs.

Record it:

Having found a successful pathway or perhaps noting which ones lead off cliffs, the next important step is to write it down or record it.

Assessment and accountability are increasing parts of our lives. It's important that institutions create a "climate of examining and sharing our accomplishments" as opposed to an oppressive regime of accountability. There are things we can and should measure and activities best discussed qualitatively. It is important not to get the conversations and measurements confused. NASAD standards and guidelines are extraordinarily helpful in this.

It is critical to record our accomplishments. First, when things are bad, it's good to remember when something good got done! Perhaps more importantly, it provides information that can be easily disseminated to others, either in support of a program or goal, or simply as a positive marketing tool. I firmly believe that the value of an education is made up in equal parts of student expectations, what is actually provided, and what other people think was received. They only know that if it is recorded and they are able to share the information.

Point the way for others:

I am such a dyed-in-the-wool modernist, I really do believe in the concept of progress. At our core, along with our self-identity as artists and scholars, we are educators and mentors, and our job is to help others go further. Ethical behavior to me implies making the world better for others when you leave it than it was when you found it...

Along with making art and design that is sustainable, I think we need to pay attention to making our institutions sustainable as well. For instance, our student bodies: I mentioned at the Executive Committee last night that when I went to school it cost my parents about 10% of their income to send me to a private college. That college cost \$3000 - \$3500 a year in the 1960s. Today, it is \$35,000 - \$40,000. If this represented 10% of your income, you would be in a very small part of the population. The cost for a Texas student to go to UNT each year is now about \$14,000. The median income of a four-person family in Texas is \$60,000, if they are employed! So what is considered a good-value education would take nearly 25% of that family's income each year. We need to find ways to sustain our students.

Sharing our successes points the way for others to accomplish as well. For our programs to advance, we need people leading the way. This avant-garde has a critical role to play, but our culture doesn't improve until there is a major shift in popular values, which is only accomplished as more people follow the new pathways. We need people who find the way, record it, and share it with others so they can improve it even further.